

Hunter Mountain Showcases Hunter North and Rebranded Original Faces

Story and photos by Jonathan Ment

HUNTER – A nine million dollar investment, the largest ski resort expansion on the East Coast in over 15 years, is something to celebrate.

For Peak Resort's Hunter Mountain, that included hosting a "media day," attracting a range of writers for a boots-on-the-ground experience on Jan. 17.

Experienced and novice skiers, mostly bloggers or contributors to media websites, and even this mild-mannered reporter, heard about the eight month and eight day construction cycle that from announcement to opening day last Christmas Eve.

Jamie Storrs, Peak's Senior Director of Communication said that unlike many resorts, Peak has the resources to handle a much of the work that went into creating Hunter North in-house. "We have that construction arm," he said. In fact, Peak Re-

sorts' personnel handled almost every aspect of construction from clearing the trees to installation of new lifts and snowmaking.

"That's the competitive advantage . . . being able to do that," he said.

Hunter's new trails required a new lift, and a chair now transports skiers and riders from the bottom to the intersection of the existing Belt Parkway and Way Out trails. From there skiers can take a run down Belt Parkway to reach the main base area and lodge. "This was a big lift year at a lot of resorts," said Storrs.

Hunter Mountain's Communications Manager Daniel Kenney said many season pass holders and even mid-week skiers like to park at Hunter North - where tickets are currently available right at the base of the lift.

In-between information sessions were opportunities for lessons and to ski the new in-

termediate and expert area Hunter North area, the established dedicated-expert trails of Hunter West and the beginners area now known as Hunter East. (Where I spent my ski time)

Among the takeaways for momtrends.com blogger Nicole Feliciano, perhaps a given for those of us who travel past the slopes often and note the number of tiny dots moving down the trails, is to advise her readers to come mid-week.

That thought was echoed by Sonja "Sony" Stark, a videographer; travel writer for Gonomad.com; and blogger for an Albany-area daily newspaper.

Stark brought along her 75-year-old mother Helma Bond, who geared up for our group 'beginners' lesson for a first ever Alpine-skiing adventure.

Bond and I, along with several other writers benefitted from the patience and expertise

of ski instructor Sharon Cash, a part-year Tannersville resident.

My main takeaway from the day, after 20 years covering the local ski slopes from mostly business perspective, is on the value of lessons.

I've skied around a half dozen times over the years - locally and in the Adirondacks and often beyond my ability. While, I've never been bitten by the ski 'bug.' This outing was different. The lesson provided a crucial new skill to learn and I spent five runs with a novice trail almost to myself, practicing.

Having even a small sense of what I was doing made for the most fun I've ever had at the sport. It reinforced a key concept behind the value of lessons.

While there's 100 percent snow making coverage from summit to base on the balance of the resort's trails, the past weekend's snowfall, the first significant natu-

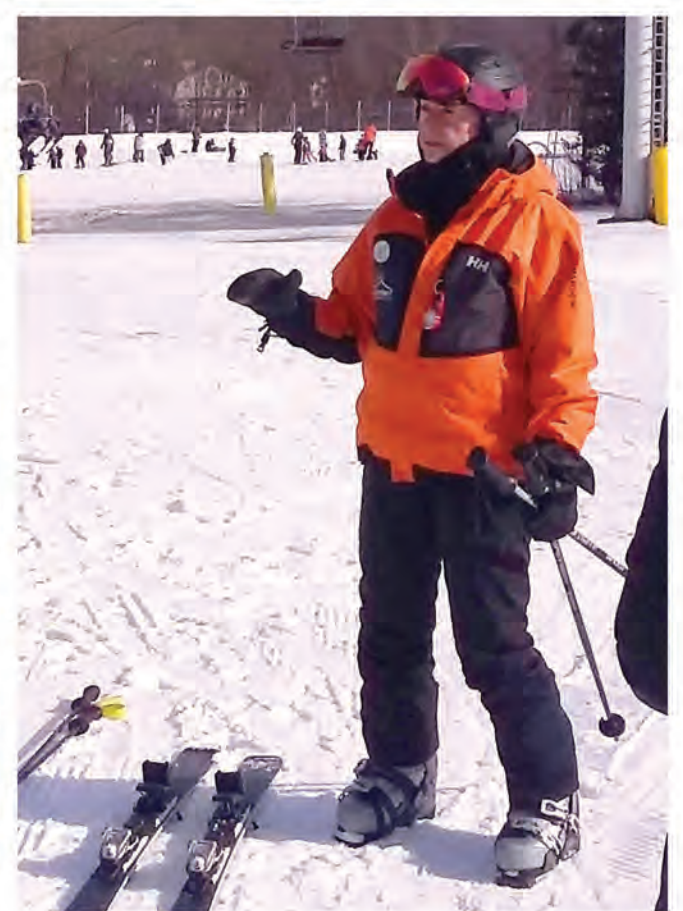
ral snow since opening, was expected to make possible skiing on Hunter North's new off-trail Glades.

Hunter Mountain will be celebrating its 60th season next year, said

Kenney, and more big things, from the Tap New York Craft Beer and Food event in April to Hunter's festival season are on the horizon at the four-season resort.



A deluxe motor coach delivered some writers from New York City. Communications Manager Daniel Kenney greeted the group upon arrival. Others found their own way to Hunter Mountain.



Ski instructor Sharon Cash addresses the group lesson.



A chilly but picture-perfect day for skiing Hunter Mountain . . . even the beginner trails.



Trail map and Progression Sessions 'report card' from the day

Swap Out the Lead Talk to be Offered at EagleFest

By Jonathan Ment

Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center's Barbara "Missy" Runyan will be promoting her "Swap out the lead" initiative at the upcoming EagleFest, a celebration of the bald eagle's return to the Hudson Valley after time on the brink of extinction.

Bald eagles are our national bird and an increasingly common site in the Catskills - and down the Hudson Valley as they make their winter migration. The event features over 25 exhibitors, live bird-of-prey exhibits, and viewing scopes on Feb.9 from 9 - 4 p.m.

Runyan will speak about her "Swap out the lead" initiative focused on encouraging a switch to copper bullets where the use of lead is likely to find its way into wildlife.

"We test a lot of the birds of prey," says Runyan, adding, "When the rivers freeze early

(making fish harder to reach), you get a lot of eagles coming in with lead toxicity because they're monopolizing the food that they can get. That means they're congregating in areas where there are a lot of hit-by-car deer."

"Some . . . police departments, all the way down to Westchester, they will swap out a clip and put in their copper clip when they dispatch a deer," says Runyan.

But the initiative is also directed at hunters.

"When you hunt and field dress, the lead trail is throughout the body," says Runyan, adding "They take the meat after it's butchered and . . . leave the entrails behind."

Bald eagles, other birds of prey and more wildlife, which feed on those leavings, are contaminated.

"One grain of lead, the size of a grain of rice, can kill an eagle," says Runyan, who uses copper bullets herself if she's called to a field

about an injured creature that she determines can't be saved."

"I'm a realist . . . There's a way to coexist and do things responsibly," says Runyan, adding, "Unfortunately, hunting with lead whether birdshot or the bullet, keeps killing long after its fired."

"I'm not a hunter," says Runyan, but she's quick to add, "I'm not a vegan either. I feel that sometimes hunting, if it's done properly, can be more humane than factory farming these days."

Copper bullets cost about .33 cents more than lead ones, she says, so if a responsible hunter takes that one lethal shot, the small investment can make a life or death difference for wildlife after the hunter has gone.

"I'm asked to do a lot more presentations than I can do, but this is for lead so I'm driving two and a half hours each way to do it," said

Runyan, adding, "I'll also have a booth there."

EagleFest is held at Croton Point Park in Croton-on-Hudson by Teatown, a nonprofit 1,000-acre nature preserve and environmental conservation center. With 15 miles of hiking trails, a two-acre island refuge for over 230 species of native wildflowers, year-round programming, wildlife exhibits, and natural science day camps in the summer and school breaks.

Though held largely under heated tents, in the event of heavy snow it will be held Feb. 10. More information is available at www.teatown.org

The Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization run entirely one donations and by volunteers - including Runyan.

The center's "Freeze Your Butt Off for Wildlife Bake Sale will be

held Saturday Feb. 16, in tents set up beside the Go Greene Food Mart in Tannersville. The tents are heated through the generosity of Mountain Propane Inc. It's one of two annual fundraising

events for the wildlife center.

More information about the work they do and ways to support it can be found at www.fff-wildlifecenter.com



Barbara "Missy" Runyan with a banded Bald Eagle. Photo provided.